



UNIVERSITY of NEBRASKA  
LINCOLN

Search for the Executive Director of the Nebraska Innovation Campus  
and Associate Vice Chancellor for Strategic Industry Partnerships  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, Nebraska

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) seeks an experienced and collaborative leader to serve as the new Executive Director of the Nebraska Innovation Campus (NIC) and Associate Vice Chancellor for Strategic Industry Partnerships and (ED/AVC). Reporting to the Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, the Executive Director/Associate Vice Chancellor will be the first in this newly elevated and expanded role, overseeing the development and operations of the NIC, while leading and expanding industry relations efforts at the University.

The ED/AVC will join the University at a pivotal moment as UNL embarks on expanding their industry partnership efforts in Nebraska and beyond to realize their [N2025](#) strategic plan. The ED/AVC will have the opportunity to shape this role in its development due to the support of a highly dedicated University leadership team, including a Vice Chancellor with extensive experience in innovation and a Chancellor who will help ensure the resources needed for growth—which is already reflected in new buildings coming online in the next few years to support new partnerships and research endeavors. While the NIC has been successful in achieving 95% occupancy through organic development, the new ED/AVC will be proactive and strategic outreach efforts to expand mutually beneficial partnerships and give businesses a clear path to form relationships with the institution. The ED/AVC will build their team and facilitate collaborations across UNL to augment the broad array of talent, expertise, and infrastructure already offered at UNL to further position the University and the NIC as industry's first-choice partner. With success, the ED/AVC will expand research capacity, augment experiential learning and job placement opportunities for students, and ensure NIC is major driver for economic development in the state and the region.

UNL is a leading national research university with a deep commitment to its land-grant mission, consistently recognized for its value and access to the citizens of Nebraska and beyond. It is located in the vibrant city of Lincoln with nearly 300,000 people and a highly educated workforce that is attractive to business expansion and new business development. The state of Nebraska's and the city of Lincoln's business-friendly policies have paved the way for strong growth and record-high employment, and it is currently ranked by CNBC as the Midwest's [Top State for Business](#), while also placing in the top 10 overall. The economic development offices throughout the state are also highly supportive of UNL and the NIC, as UNL and the state government are both large contributors to the local economy and constitute approximately a quarter of the city's economy. Agriculture and manufacturing are key employers, with one in every four jobs in the state touching the agricultural sector, and UNL is at the forefront of AgTech

innovation on a national level. Additionally, Lincoln also has a growing technology sector and was recently featured in national news as the “Silicon Prairie.”

UNL has strengths in water research, food innovation, computing, robotics, and national security, and Nebraska is leading national and global discussions on sustainable agricultural solutions. With the NIC’s remarkable reputation, UNL has the opportunity to leverage these many strengths while discovering new areas for growth to attract businesses interested in making a difference, as well as the talented students, staff, and faculty who are eager to contribute. With success, UNL and the NIC will augment and expand industry partnerships, and bring highly-skilled jobs to Lincoln and the state, while also diversifying the economy for even greater economic impact.

UNL has retained the services of Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist the search committee in its identification and review of candidates. A full list of the desired qualifications and responsibilities of the ED/AVC can be found below. Confidential inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes with cover letters should be directed in confidence as noted at the end of this document.

#### **ABOUT THE NEBRASKA INNOVATION CAMPUS (NIC) AND INDUSTRY RELATIONS (IR)**

Established in 2012, the NIC connects the talents of experts, companies, and the University to create a unique culture of innovation. NIC is a campus designed to facilitate new and in-depth partnerships between the University of Nebraska and private sector businesses. NIC is adjacent to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and strategically provides access to research faculty, facilities and students. NIC aspires to be the most sustainable research and technology campus in the United States. NIC currently boasts 570,000 square feet of unique spaces that include office, wet/dry lab, pilot plant, high bay, and greenhouse, and it partners with over 60 diverse entities from the private and public sector. Organizations leasing space at NIC are a mix of startups, medium-sized companies, and larger companies. For a list of current NIC Partners, please visit <https://innovate.unl.edu/partners>.

Overall, NIC’s economic impact is approximately \$454.7 million, with over 2,100 jobs created and an estimated 1,950 job years generated city and statewide by investment projects. The NIC supports startup companies, established companies with R&D presence, and numerous partnerships with companies and agencies. These efforts help attract the most talented faculty, support long-term impact on the economic region, and contribute to distinctive academic programs for students.

At full build-out, NIC will be a 2.2-million-square-foot campus with uniquely designed buildings and amenities that encourage people to create and transform ideas into global innovation. It is envisioned that up to 5,000 people could be working on NIC, with  $\frac{1}{3}$  employed by the university and  $\frac{2}{3}$  employed by private business and non-university employees. The development on NIC will be a dense urban environment with multi-story buildings. Current progress in achieving these aspirations include:

- \$25 million in new state funding for a new \$50 million [agricultural innovation facility](#) on the Innovation Campus, with the remaining \$25 million expected to come via private funds. This

facility will serve as a companion to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s proposed \$140 million National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture.

- In September 2022, component projects under the Heartland Robotics Cluster received a total of \$25 million from the U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration, of which NIC was awarded \$4.5 million. The Heartland Robotics Cluster aims to accelerate Nebraska’s leadership in the agricultural industry through robotic technologies and advanced manufacturing automation while also revitalizing the region’s rural labor force and strengthening the nation’s food supply chain.

The NIC currently consists of:

- The [Nebraska Innovation Studio](#) (NIS) is one of the nation’s top makerspaces. The studio is a 16,000-square-foot facility that houses a full metal shop, wood shop, rapid prototyping room, art studio, ceramics and textiles equipment – and much more.
- The [Nebraska Innovation Campus Conference Center](#) is housed in a historic building that has been reconstructed to provide a unique full-service conference center. Operated and managed by the Nebraska Alumni Association, it is a multi-functional meeting and collaboration space that includes a 400-seat auditorium, 400-seat banquet hall, and eight breakout rooms.
- The recently funded [Heartland Robotics Cluster](#), led by the Invest Nebraska Corporation, will serve as a compelling model for engaging rural communities that are often left behind in technology-based economic development. The cluster will support NIC’s expansion in robotics-specific programming and prototyping equipment, creating an environment for innovators from across the state and from a variety of demographics to develop automation and robotic solutions to growing demands for workers and manufacturing production.
- The [Food Innovation Center](#) is a 178,000 square foot complex serving private/public partnerships. The center provides world-class facilities for the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Food Science and Technology Department and private companies in leased space. It features wet/dry lab research space, food grade/non-food grade pilot plant space, a state-of-the-art distance education classroom and office space.
- The [Greenhouse Innovation Center](#) is 45,000 square feet of greenhouse and headhouse space. The facility features state-of-the-art computer environmental controls, a LemnaTec High-Throughput Plant Phenotyping system, and 22-foot eave heights to allow for optimal air circulation. The greenhouses are heated and cooled with sustainable energy. Tailored greenhouse services are available.
- Other establishments located at the NIC include the [Scarlet Hotel](#), a brand-new six-story, 154-room boutique hotel, and the [Mill Coffee & Bistro](#).

NIC is a 501c3 not-for-profit corporation owned by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska. There is a Board of Directors of the Nebraska Innovation Campus Development Corporation (NICDC), which includes six private-sector members, three University representatives, and three officers, with the

ED/AVC being an ex-officio member. For more information about the Board, please visit: <https://innovate.unl.edu/board-committees>.

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The [Industry Relations](#) (IR) team proactively works with a broad collection of companies to attract and grow partner company presence at the NIC, to develop and sustain collaborative research projects, enable access to university and company R&D infrastructure, and pursue curriculum partnerships, capstone projects, internships, and experiential learning. The IR team is a key partner for Nebraska economic development programs that target business startup, growth, and recruiting.

Current resources at UNL that will be good partners to the ED/AVC include the [Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute](#) (DWFI), the [National Strategic Research Institute](#) (NSRI), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Agricultural Marketing Service](#). As part of UNL's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, DWFI addresses all aspects of the water challenges in the state and has been located on the Innovation Campus since 2015. As one of only 14 university-affiliated research center laboratories, NSRI is part of the University of Nebraska system and delivers responsive, innovative research to the Department of Defense and other federal agencies. With Nebraska being a leader in the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service effort to create food business models domestically and internationally, they are a key partner in developing leaders from underrepresented groups.

## UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC VISION

Dr. Robert G. (Bob) Wilhelm joined the University in 2018 as the Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, after previously serving as Vice Chancellor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Earlier in his career, Wilhelm worked at the Palo Alto Laboratory of Rockwell Science Center and Cincinnati Milacron as well as co-founding a high-tech company, OpSource. He is a recognized expert in precision engineering and advanced manufacturing. He is a Fellow of the National Academy of Inventors and the International Academy for Production Engineering. In Charlotte, he led the reorganization of the University Research Park as chair of University City Partners, worked to define a state-wide agenda for research and innovation while serving on the NC Board of Science, Technology, and Innovation. For more information about the Office of Research & Economic Development (ORED), please visit: <https://research.unl.edu/>.

Dr. Ronnie D. Green is the 20<sup>th</sup> Chancellor. Prior to being named Chancellor in 2016, Green served for six years as the Harlan Vice Chancellor of the UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources of the University of Nebraska system. Green has served on the animal science faculties of Texas Tech University and Colorado State University, and as the national program leader for animal production research for the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and executive secretary of the White House's interagency working group on animal genomics within the National Science and Technology Council.

Under the Chancellor’s leadership, the University embarked on a 25-year vision ([N150 Vision](#)) and launched the first five-year ([N2025](#)) strategic plan in 2020, beginning an aggressive agenda that is built upon six distinct aims, three of which the ED/AVC will play a critical role in: 1) Broaden Nebraska’s engagement in community, industry, and global partnerships, 2) increase the impact of research and creativity, and foster innovative, interdisciplinary endeavors, and 3) solve challenges critical to Nebraska and the world. More information about UNL is available in Appendix I at the conclusion of this document.

## **ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND ASSOCIATE VICE CHANCELLOR**

As a member of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development’s senior leadership team, the ED/AVC will provide strategic direction and operational guidance while managing and facilitating University-wide industry relations and the NIC team. The ED/AVC will serve as a visible University spokesperson and point of contact for economic development efforts to promote the UNL academic, research, and engagement missions. They will improve University processes and practices related to engagement with industry and other technology-based economic development stakeholders to encourage external entities to collaborate. The ED/AVC will work closely with UNL leadership and the NIC Board of Directors, and leads collaborative efforts of a larger economic development team spanning ORED, [NUtech Ventures](#), the [Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources](#), UNL, the region, the state, and the nation. They will lead collaborations with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) and other economic development agencies on various projects targeting business startups, company growth, and recruiting.

The ED/AVC develops and coordinates UNL relationships with companies, including but not limited to, efforts to attract partner companies to NIC and other UNL facilities, secure external research funding, develop and sustain collaborative research and economic development projects, enable access to University and company R&D infrastructure, and pursue curriculum partnerships, capstone projects, internships, and experiential learning. This includes collaborating closely with deans and faculty to provide recommendations around industry needs to augment curriculum and impact workforce development. The ED/AVC leads NIC infrastructure planning and development, NIC client services and user experience, and NIC marketing. They also manage relationships with commercial developers as well as government and institutional partners that build and operate facilities on NIC. As required, the ED/AVC will lead University, state, and regional projects that leverage the resources of NIC and other UNL facilities.

The ED/AVC currently has a team of four direct reports: the Director of Industry Relations (in ORED), the Director of Strategic Partnerships & Communications (NIC), the Culture & Operations Manager for the NIC, and the Director of Nebraska Innovation Studio. The ED/AVC will be expected to build a team, including planned funding for additional professionals for both IR and the real estate operations of Innovation Campus.

## **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

This position requires strong interpersonal and communication skills and the ability to work collaboratively with many internal and external constituencies. The successful candidate will have an MBA or similar graduate degree related to job duties and 10 years' experience in economic or business development, university-industry research, or other program development. The ED/AVC will also bring the following professional qualities and experiences:

- A deep appreciation for the mission, culture, achievements, and aspirations of UNL and the ability to articulate its relevance.
- Knowledge of cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship strategies and techniques for business development and/or recruitment of university partners.
- Experience cultivating and empowering staff through active communication and delegation, promoting diversity of thought, and encouraging new ideas.
- Demonstrated experience as a successful manager within a complex organization.
- Proven ability to work with potential partner companies including startups, small, medium, and large corporate organizations.
- Self-motivation and discipline to regularly set and achieve work goals.
- Demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Ability to manage all levels of relationship facilitation with a high number of sponsors and faculty.
- Excellent organizational, interpersonal, and networking skills with large groups as well as with individuals.

#### **PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS**

- Program building experience in higher education.
- Experience in higher education research development, industry/university engagement, or industry business development.
- Knowledge of the university partnership value proposition, comparative advantages, and resources relevant to industry, including instrumentation, services, and associated use processes and policies.
- Knowledge of and experience with university research parks and innovation campuses.

#### **ABOUT LINCOLN, NEBRASKA**

Situated in the city of Lincoln, UNL plays an integral part in the success and future of the city. As collaborative and open partners, the city of Lincoln and UNL are deeply committed to the success of their counterpart. Lincoln has many of the cultural and entertainment benefits of a much larger city, with the feel of a friendly Midwestern community. As the state capital, most of Nebraska state agencies and offices are located in Lincoln, as are several United States government agencies.

Lincoln boasts a highly educated workforce with an unemployment rate of 2.9% and the median age is 32.8. The West Haymarket project, which has developed since 2014 has spurred rapid growth associated

with several large organizations, including Hudl, a technology firm started by graduates of UNL’s Jeffrey S. Raikes School, and Olsson, an engineering and architecture firm. The University’s partnership with the city and private groups in redeveloping a former railyard into a sports and concert arena has sparked renewed interest in housing, retail, and other activities within walking distance of the city campus.

With the most parkland per capita in the nation, an extensive (and growing) bike trail network, many diverse employment opportunities, and a low cost of living, Lincoln is one of the fastest growing metro areas in the Midwest, yet still boasts an easy average commute time of 18 minutes door to door. Lincoln has been rated the #1 Healthiest City by *Daily Finance*, Happiest City by *Gallup*, #1 Best Places to Find a Job, #4 Best Places for Business and Careers by *Forbes*, #4 Best Run City in the Nation by *MSN*, Top 10 Cities to Buy a Home by *ABC News*, #4 Best Place to Raise a Family by *Gallup*, and one of the Cleanest U.S. Cities by *American Lung Association*.

The Lincoln Municipal Airport (LNK) is located 10 minutes from downtown, with the larger airport Omaha Eppley Airfield (OMA) located in Omaha, about 60 minutes away from campus. Lincoln lies adjacent to Interstate 80, which crosses the state. Click [here](#) to learn more about life in Lincoln.

#### **APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS**

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: [www.imsearch.com/8812](http://www.imsearch.com/8812).

Lindsay Gold, Phuong Ta, and Brian Burbank  
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*As an EO/AA employer, the University of Nebraska considers qualified applicants for employment without regard to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation. See <http://www.unl.edu/equity/notice-nondiscrimination>.*

## **APPENDIX I: ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN (UNL)**

Founded as a land-grant institution in 1869, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is the flagship institution among the four universities of the University of Nebraska system. UNL ranks among the world’s leading universities and is the state’s primary intellectual center through its three primary missions of teaching, research, and service. The University’s land-grant tradition creates a state-wide responsibility to serve the needs of Nebraska and its citizens. Through Nebraska Extension and its partnerships with federal, state, and county agencies, the University has an outreach program in each county in the state.

UNL is designated in the Carnegie Classification system as a research university with very high research activity (R1) and a wide array of grant-funded projects aimed at broadening knowledge in the sciences and humanities. The University set new records with \$321 million in total research expenditures in FY 2021. By connecting everything it does to its research, scholarship, and creative activity, the University ensures these innovations shape the education provided to its students. It is a member of the Big Ten Conference and the Big Ten Academic Alliance and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

The University enjoys strong public support from the citizens of Nebraska, and UNL contributes to a strong workforce and vibrant economy within the state. Nebraskans view UNL as “their Land-Grant University” and are vested in its success. The [University of Nebraska Foundation](#) completed a \$1.2 billion capital campaign, raising \$1.8 billion. Planning for the next major campaign is underway. Over the last 10 years, more than \$1 billion has been invested in significant major capital construction, including academic and research facilities, supported by both private gifts and state funding. The state will be providing \$216 million in building upgrades which include new construction and renovations.